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## The Enemy

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# The Enemy

JOHN COYNE

The night the Phantoms struck for the final time in the halls of Saint Philip College's freshman dormitory bringing down the wrath of their resentment on the long suffering head of Freddy Longshaw, Paul Darnell, second floor proctor, was quietly and completely drunk at the nearby College Inn.

Since five o'clock that afternoon when, angered and frustrated, he had stormed from Father O'Donnell's room to seek in the solitude of the bar a few hours of stolen freedom from his responsibilities as dormitory proctor, Paul had come to the sudden realization that his long sought after and applied neutrality was slipping away from its moorings.

The cause of Paul's troubles was the bulky, sandy haired, ex Army chaplain, Father Dan O'Donnell, freshman dormitory director, and Paul's immediate and only superior. Father had summoned Paul that afternoon, as soon as he heard about it, to give an account of the latest outbreak on the second floor.

"Nothing at all to it, Father." Paul hurried to comment as he settled uneasily into the chair opposite O'Donnell's desk. "Just some of the boys acting up. They're excited you know about Christmas vacation." He started a smile but faded it when Father continued to sit brooding.

"You don't think tearing the picture of the Blessed Virgin off Longshaw's door is anything to get excited about?" His charging voice jumped at Paul.

"Yes, Father, but . . . but under the circumstances I don't feel the boys intended any disrespect." He selected his words

carefully, skirted away from any commitment. It was going to be another of those meetings. Father was out for blood.

"This is the fifth time isn't it?"

"Yes, Father, I believe so."

Paul knew damn well how many times it had happened. Each time little Freddy, his face torn with anguish, had brought him the evidence. "Do you see this," he would say extending the fragments. "They did it again last night." And each time with his understatement, his failure to condemn or demand reprisal, he was blaming Paul for letting it happen, until now, the fifth time, when he had by-passed him and carried the remains, like a sick child, right to the top, to Father Dan.

"I understand each incident is accompanied with a message: 'The Phantoms strike again.' Is that right?"

Paul shifted uncomfortably in the chair, crossed his long legs. Father's unemotional voice bore down on him. It was getting around to the Phantoms now. He ran his finger, a nervous habit, along the brink of his large nose and answered vaguely.

"Something like that, Father. I'm not sure."

"You're not sure? Don't you patrol that floor?"

Paul struggled silently under the attack. Father was going military again. There was nothing he could do. Perhaps the worst would be a new set of regulations. Paul avoided Father's face and glanced around the room. In the far corner a small bunk bed was neatly made. His shoes were aligned at the foot, all polished, shining for inspection. Over the bed next to a crucifix was a large framed glossy picture of Father O'Donnell standing with a formation of soldiers. Across the top of the picture written in dark ink through a cloudless sky was the inscription: "To Fighting Father Dan O'Donnell . . . Good Luck . . . from your men of the 173rd."

"I check the rooms at Lights Out, Father, but I don't go out after that unless there's noise."

Father shoved a cigar between his lips, worked it around with his teeth to the right corner of his mouth, and lit it.

"They've got you mapped out, Darnell. You'll have to use some diversified measures if we're going to catch them." He leaned forward, dropped his elbows on the desk, and stared at Paul. "We're in charge here and things are getting out of hand."

Paul's eyes bent under the pressure and glanced guiltily away.

"Perhaps, Father," he began slowly. "If we eliminate the cause . . ."

"What cause?"

"It seems, Father, from what's happened and everything, that the boys resent Fred's actions."

"What actions?"

Father dealt the questions out coldly, like cards.

"With regard to waking them for Mass on Sunday mornings."

"Do you find anything wrong with that, Paul? I think we could use a little lay apostle work in this dorm, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, Father. It's just that the boys resent . . ."

"Discipline's the word. They resent the discipline. It's too damn bad! They'll get plenty in the Army. You weren't in the service, Paul? . . . that's right . . . something was wrong . . . 4F?"

"Yes, Father, nervous tension."

"Well it doesn't matter. What I want you to know is that we have to run a dormitory with discipline. There's no place for trouble-makers. Now I want you to put a stop to all this midnight prowling."

Paul glanced up.

"But you always handle these matters, Father . . ."

"I know, but I think it would be best if we followed chain-of-command in this situation." He released the cigar from his mouth, held it out between his thick fingers, flipping ashes carelessly into a tray.

Paul tightened under the announcement. He did not like this at all. Until now everything had been fine. He had left the boys alone and they hadn't bothered him, except for Longshaw, it had been a peaceful arrangement. Don't look for trouble and it won't find you. It was a maxim he always followed.

"Get the names of those Phantoms, Darnell. We'll deal with them individually. And don't let those young faces fool you. Students are always scheming. Keep them on defense; it's the best offense. Let me know when you have the names." He jammed out his cigar and dismissed Paul with a nod.

Paul hurried upstairs to his room. He was too agonized to protest longer. What he had feared most was happening. His intervention into disciplinary matters. For four months, since becoming dorm proctor, he had avoided, shifted, neglected,

disciplinary actions. Now it was being pushed on him against his will. He swallowed two tranquilizers, grabbed a coat, and left the building.

For the next five hours in the quiet of the College Inn Paul fought with his problem. There seemed no possible way out. He would have to take a stand against the boys. It was not the safety or involvement of the students that he feared, but rather the consequences of what would happen once it was known he had put the finger on the Phantoms.

However, while Paul sat at the bar the real threat to his security (unknown to him) had already begun to form in the second floor of the freshman dorm he had abandoned. Bill Vicars, medical student and undisputed leader of the Phantoms, had been since seven o'clock that evening recruiting members for the latest and biggest attack on the common enemy of the freshman students: Freddy Longshaw.

Bill Vicar's personal feud with Longshaw had begun earlier that semester when Freddy primed him out of bed, with a half glass of water, to make the twelve o'clock Mass.

Vicars, groggy with sleep, had sprung from the bed, thrown a wide, round-house left hand that caught air before Freddy's startled eyes. Falling away Freddy escaped through the door into the safety of his own room across the hall as Vicars hotly pursued.

"What the hell you doin', Longshaw?" Bill shouted after him.

Doors opened on the floor and students stepped out to see the commotion. Several wandered down to get the story.

"I was stone dead . . . a hangover from last night, when . . . whammy . . . right in my goddam face a glass of water." Vicars glanced at his audience. "I could have killed him." He stepped forward and banged at Freddy's door. "You hear me, Longshaw? Don't go pullin' that stuff with me again . . . understand?" Silence answered him and standing dumbly a few minutes longer staring at the door he turned around and waddled back barefoot into his room, slammed the door, and flopped into bed.

In the sanctuary of his room Fred Longshaw contemplated the outbreak. This sudden and unexpected act of violence had left him momentarily tense. He eased into a chair and enjoyed the quiet.

Freddy Longshaw, a seventeen-year-old Latin major, was

slightly built. His face, pear shaped and sad, floated always through a half dozen agonizing expressions. A long stiff neck connected it rigidly to a fragile body. For the past four months he had been a piercing thorn to the peace of the freshmen. It was his self-imposed habit to roam the halls on Sunday morning hunting students who had overslept or intended to miss Mass.

"You're Catholic aren't you?" He would declare standing firmly behind his dogma when they cursed him for waking them. Grumbling they would roll from bed, start to dress, as Freddy, satisfied, watched.

This morning, however, it had been different. Faced with his first serious opposition a wave of excitement stimulated his delicate body. Finally he was to have his first challenge—a chance to exercise his religion; to bring a soul back to God. He visualized himself a champion of the Faith and gloried in a hundred daydream acts of suffering.

Bill Vicars' loose fitting slippers slapped against the tile floor with urgent impatience as he hurried from room to room explaining his plan. The attack against Longshaw, which swept favorably through the hall, was to take place at eleven that night when Freddy came back from saying the rosary in the dormitory's chapel.

Time clicked slowly around to ten o'clock as the Phantoms waited. Longshaw, unaware of any danger, picked up his rosary and left his room. Vicars, camped in his dark room across the hall, restrained a temptation to peep into the hall.

Outside on the walk Father O'Donnell, coming back to the dorm after an Army Reserve meeting, glanced at the dark windows of the second floor. Thinking Darnell had already begun clamping down on the students he smiled and went into his room.

Two blocks away at the height of this activity Darnell ordered another round. The problem of the afternoon still stirred unresolved in his mind. The beer had left him both tired and sick. Gushes of self-pity washed through him. He had come to the sad conclusion he was everyone's victim. The thought brought him some comfort.

Yet his immediate problem centered on Father O'Donnell and the Phantoms. He would have to supply the names. What plagued him was that it was not his fault. Hadn't he left them all alone? It was not fair! He remembered bitterly how he had pleaded with Vicars to stop the raids.

"What are you after?" Darnell had asked sneaking down to Vicars' room one night.

"Who said I'm a Phantom, Darnell?" Vicars, already in bed, sat up and lit a cigarette. "Where do you get all these ideas? Is that what you've been doing in that room with the door locked?"

"Cut it! Do you understand I want this midnight crap stopped!"

"Listen, Darnell, if you tell me what you're doing in your room with the door locked, I'll tell you who the Phantoms are. A deal?"

Paul thought a moment of how it would feel to jump forward and slap the hell out of Vicars. He watched him move an arm over his eyes noticing the muscles flex under his tee shirt.

"All right, Vicars, I've warned you. I'm not responsible for what happens, remember that." Then, helpless, he barged from the room.

The beer was sour on Paul's lips. It was now ten fifteen. He would have to leave. Lights Out was in another fifteen minutes. Stumbling off the stool he grabbed his coat, worked it onto his shoulders, and stepped outside. The sudden cold of the winter night slapped his face. Turning against it he started up the hill toward the college. His mind whirling with a hundred disarranged and confused thoughts. Hadn't he told Freddy to quit hanging the pictures, he mumbled into the hostile air.

"Why do you bring me those pictures?" he had asked Freddy. "It's not my fault."

"You're proctor."

"What's with you, Longshaw?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you post those pictures?"

"I have my reasons."

"And waking guys for Mass?"

"They have an obligation."

"That's their problem."

"I'm just practicing my faith, that's all."

"Then practice it alone. You've caused me nothing but trouble since the year started."

"I haven't bothered you."

"The hell you haven't. Everytime there's a disturbance in this hall I have to answer to O'Donnell."

"Father O'Donnell?"

"Don't wise off! Now get this straight, I don't want you bringing me anymore of those pictures, do you understand?"

"Why?"

"Because, Longshaw, I don't want to be bothered; I just don't want to be bothered!"

"You mean you're afraid . . . afraid of the Phantoms."

Paul stared at the figure standing tensely in the doorway of his room. He searched the pale face for a glimpse of weakness.

"No, Longshaw, I'm not afraid. You're the one who's afraid of something . . . I don't know what . . . the Phantoms . . . yourself . . . me. And that's why I can't be bothered with you. Do you hear?"

"You hate me, don't you?" Freddy asked quietly.

"No, I don't hate you. Now get the hell out of my room."

Freddy Longshaw did not return to his room after saying the rosary. Instead he came up from the chapel, turned into the first floor hall, and knocked softly on Father O'Donnell's door.

"Who is it?"

"Fred Longshaw, Father, do you have a minute?"

The door opened and Father's big frame filled the lighted entrance.

"Come in, Fred."

"Is there anything I can do for you, Fred?" Father asked after they had sat down.

"No, Father . . . it's just that I have some information for you."

"What's that?"

"About the Phantoms."

"Oh, you won't have to worry about them any longer. Darnell's going to supply me the names of the ringleaders. I'll clean up that mess."

Longshaw watched Father a moment and then said.

"Father, I think Darnell has been fooling you. He's one of the leaders . . . Vicars is the other."

Longshaw's indictment surprised O'Donnell. He slowly unwrapped a cigar and studied the passive looking boy.

"Are you sure, Fred?"

Longshaw nodded.

"I've overheard them plotting, Father. They want me out of the dormitory."



"This is a serious matter, Fred. Do you have any proof?"

"I've seen Darnell sneaking down to Vicars' room after Lights Out, Father."

Father wiped his face with a large handkerchief and tried to gain a perspective on the issue. He reviewed Darnell's recent statement searching for a conflict of interests. The boy could be lying. This was a new problem for him. He could handle the trouble-makers, the students coming in drunk, or getting involved with girls, but this was different.

"There really isn't much to go on, Fred. Let's sleep on this and tomorrow we'll have a meeting. I don't want things to get out of order."

"I wouldn't waste too much time, Father," Freddy answered, standing up. "You should act before there's more trouble."

"There won't be any trouble, Fred, you can count on me."

"Would it be all right then if I slept down here on the first floor tonight? I'm expecting trouble in my room. I think they're out to get me again tonight."

Annoyed at Freddy's attitude, Father pulled a key from his desk and handed it to Longshaw.

"You can sleep in 112."

Freddy, smiling faintly, took the key and said goodnight. Father watched him leave realizing that he did not like that boy.

Paul Darnell entered the dormitory and climbed clumsily up to the second floor. Under the exit light at the landing he leaned against the doorway waiting for his head to clear and debated whether to see Freddy Longshaw.

There was something he had to tell Longshaw. Something in the isolated and cold night he had finally admitted to himself. It was the realization that he was afraid. Afraid of all those who opposed him. He knew he would have to give up his proctor's position, but before he did he wanted Longshaw to know it wasn't because of him. He did not want Longshaw to gain any satisfaction out of his resignation.

In Longshaw he saw something worse than his own cowardice, something worse than the pranks of the Phantoms. He saw in Longshaw the corrupting force lurking behind the facade of religion.

Paul gathered himself together and started down the hall toward Freddy's door. He did not bother to knock, but using his pass-key opened the door and stepped inside. The room

was empty. He closed the door and sitting down on the bed waited for Freddy to return.

Across the hall Bill Vicars waited anxiously. He had heard Freddy's door open and close. Waiting ten more nervous minutes he then stepped into the hall and listened at Longshaw's door.

Inside, a steady, heavy sound of breathing filled the silence. Vicars signalled for the Phantoms. Quickly they tied the door shut with a rope and taped the slit between the door and floor. Then pulling the fire hose off the wall they dropped the nozzle into the mail slot and turned on the water. A steady stream of water poured into Longshaw's room. On the bed Darnell slept peacefully. Outside in the hall the Phantoms shambled back to their rooms.

Paul slept for three hours before the annoying sound of running water woke him. He blinked his eyes open in the dark room. His mind whirled with dizziness. Moving his right foot across the bed he dropped it to the floor. The splash of water against his stockinged foot drew him fully awake. He stood up and stared down at the water. Over an inch deep it slapped against his feet.

Darnell waded to the door. When it wouldn't open he banged against it and shouted for help.

Vicars, wide awake across the hall, listened to the commotion. The shouting voice was not yet distinct; he strained to hear what was being said. Then it was not Longshaw's voice he heard, but Darnell's. He jumped up and hurried into the hall. Darnell's voice loud, frightened, belligerent, called from behind the door. He couldn't understand how Darnell had been caught in Longshaw's room. Quickly he cut the rope that held the door and jumped back into the safety of his room.

Darnell jerked the door open and blurted into the hall, his feet wrapped in the escaping tide. He stood in the hall for a moment and then started toward the stairway, his walk faltering from drunkenness and cloudy with sleep.

At the stairway his stomach heaved from the abuse of beer and nerves. He reached to secure himself. His hand, reaching for the railing, missed; his feet, wet and slick from the tide of water, slipped on the concrete, and Paul Darnell fell forward, graceful as a stuffed animal, into a crashing heap at the bottom of the stairs.